

To: National Park Authority, 30 September 2022

From: Marc Ronan, Monitoring Officer

Multilocation Meeting Policy

Decision Required	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> / NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Agenda Item	11
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Recommendation

Approve the policy attached as **Appendix One**

Key Messages

Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, authorities are required to put in place arrangements for multi-location meetings.

This report presents the benefits associated with adopting a remote meeting policy, along with the analysis done around the alternative hybrid model.

It is recommended that Members note and approve the attached policy (**Appendix One**) and that a review will be undertaken 12 months following the implementation of the policy.

Background

Section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 makes provision to allow for “remote meetings”. At the outset of the Covid-19 Pandemic in March 2020 the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 enabled local authorities to convene meetings by remote means.

Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, local authorities are required to put in place, and publish, arrangements for multi-location meetings, that is, formal meetings where meeting participants may not all be in the same physical place. The meeting arrangements are comprised of the rules and procedures adopted by the local authority in accordance with the statutory requirements and should be reflected in the Authority’s Standing Orders.

Alongside the legally mandated arrangements that authorities must make for multilocation meetings, authorities should develop a wider policy setting out the detailed systems chosen by the authority for the operation of its multi-location meetings.

The draft policy attached (**Appendix One**) takes account of interim statutory guidance issued by Welsh Government (WG), which sets out guiding principles to be considered in developing multi-location meeting arrangements, as well as practical considerations. The guidance also lists suggested issues to be included in the policy but indicates that the exact contents of the policy will be agreed at local level.

WG guidance notes: *‘A multi-location meetings policy may make provision that different kinds of meeting be convened, by default, with all participants joining through remote means, or with some arrangement being made for people to attend and participate and observe in person. Policies should recognise that the Act requires participants to be able to join meetings through remote means for all formal meetings. It will not be permitted for relevant authorities to decide that all meetings will be held entirely physically. Physical meetings should not be seen as representing the “gold standard” with multi-location meetings being second best. Physical meetings may be convenient and effective for those most familiar with and comfortable with how they work – but they may also be inaccessible and impractical to many.’*

The Authority has the following committees which support its statutory, regulatory and governance arrangements and all meetings must be able to operate as multi-location meetings to ensure that participants are able to attend remotely:

- Full Authority meetings
- Chairs Committee
- Planning Committee
- Audit and Risk Committee
- Finance and Performance Committee
- Standards Committee
- Sustainable Development Fund

The Authority will continue to use Microsoft Teams as its primary remote meeting platform. This will be used by Members from their Authority or Council provided devices to ensure effective security. Non-Authority devices may be used although the functionality available when using these “guest” devices may differ from that provided by the Authority. Other participants can join meetings using links provided by the Authority contained within the meeting invitation.

An analysis of alternative venues within Brecon was undertaken and unfortunately none are available that provide bespoke facilities for hybrid meetings (where members can be physically present in a room together and members of the public still be able to join the meeting remotely). The facilities on offer mirror those already provided by the Authority to members in the Members Room and the invitation remains for members to use those facilities for meetings should they choose to do so, subject to room attendance limits.

Relation to Authority Priorities

The Authority has been holding meetings by remote means since 2020. While this has proven challenging at times, it has also resulted in several benefits:

- Enhancing and supporting local democracy - the flexibility to convene meetings in this way will reduce the barriers that might previously have been in place for explaining and demonstrating how relevant authorities do business. It also makes it easier for the public to observe meetings.
- Resilient and sustainable - the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires authorities to think, and act on, long-term needs in the way that policy is developed and made. Multi-location meetings reduce the carbon footprint of physical meetings (although digital activity is not carbon-neutral). They can also help relevant authorities in reducing the risk of future unexpected events, such as extreme weather, which could in future present a challenge to in-person meetings. Issues of sustainability are explored in more detail below.
- Reduced travel - significant time and cost savings for Members, Officers and other participants have arisen. In turn, this makes it easier for participants to take part if they have professional and caring commitments potentially removing some significant barriers to standing for public office.
- Better support for members from diverse backgrounds - just as barriers are being removed to public participation, multi-location meetings make it easier for care providers, disabled people, or people with other protected characteristics, to engage on equal-footing.

Impact Analysis

Financial - The cost to upgrade the Authority Chamber systems to allow for hybrid meetings have been quoted in the region of £50,000. Members are aware the Authority is reviewing its accommodation needs and consequently it would not be cost effective to upgrade when relocation is inevitable.

Legal – The legal requirements are set out in this report

Diversity - The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, socioeconomic duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Authority must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

Human Resources – a recent staff survey indicated that the majority of Officers wanted to retain the option to work remotely. By implementing this remote meeting policy, we can accommodate these Officers and promote our family friendly/flexible working policies.

Sustainability – as noted above, remote meetings would help reduce the Authority’s carbon footprint.

Risk

Risks have been set out within the body of this report

Conclusion and Next Steps

It is recommended that Members note and approve the attached policy (**Appendix One**) and that a review will be undertaken 12 months following the implementation of the policy.

Appendix One: Multilocation Meeting Policy
